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Part I: Peoples and Lands

Babylon, the Bible and the Australian Aborigines

Hilary M. Carey

[God] hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation (Acts 17:26. KJV)

'One Blood': John Fraser and the Origins of the Aborigines

In 1892 Dr John Fraser (1834-1904), a schoolteacher from Maitland, New South Wales, published *An Australian Language*, a work commissioned by the government of New South Wales for display in Chicago at the World's Columbian Exposition (1893).¹ Fraser's edition was just one of a range of exhibits selected to represent the products, industries and native cultures of the colony to the eyes of the world.² But it was much more than a showpiece or a simple re-printing of the collected works of Lancelot Threlkeld (1788-1859), the

¹ John Fraser, ed. *An Australian Language* (Sydney: Government Printer, 1892).

² David J. Bertuca, Donald K. Hartman, and Susan M. Neumeister, *The World's Columbian Exposition* (Westport, Conn, London: Greenwood Press, 1996).

missionary linguist who had first published these same translations and grammatical works some fifty years earlier.³ Besides delivering a serviceable edition of some rare grammatical texts, Fraser provided an extensive introduction which promoted his own theories about the peopling of the Australian continent.⁴ After an intricate argument covering issues of comparative philology, ethnology and religion, he concluded that the Aborigines of Australia were not only kin to the Dravidian peoples of southern India but that both had their origins in Biblical lands: 'In my opinion', he

³ For studies of Threlkeld's missionary linguistics see Hilary M. Carey, "Lancelot Threlkeld and Missionary Linguistics in Australia to 1850," in *Missionary Linguistics*, ed. Otto Zwartjes and Even Hovdhaugen (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2004), 253-75; David A. Roberts, "'Language to Save the Innocent': Reverend L. Threlkeld's Linguistic Mission," *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society* 94, no. 2 (2008): 107-25; Anne Keary, "Christianity, Colonialism, and Cross-Cultural Translation: Lancelot Threlkeld, Biraban and the Awabakal," *Aboriginal History* 33 (2009): 117-56; Hilary M. Carey, "Lancelot Threlkeld, Biraban and the Colonial Bible in Australia," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 52, no. 2 (2010): 447-78; James Wafer and Hilary M. Carey, "Waiting for Biraban: Lancelot Threlkeld and the 'Chibcha Phenomenon' in Australian Missionary Linguistics," *Language and History* 54, no. 2 (2011): 112-39. For biographical studies of Threlkeld see Niel Gunson, "Threlkeld, Lancelot Edward (1788 - 1859)," in *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1967), 528-30; *Australian Reminiscences and Papers of L.E. Threlkeld*, 2 vols. (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1974); Anna Johnston, "A Blister on the Imperial Antipodes: Lancelot Threlkeld in Polynesia and Australia," in *Imperial Careering in the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. David Lambert and Alan Lester (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 58-87. *The Paper War: Morality, Print Culture and Power in Colonial New South Wales* (Perth: UWA Press, 2011).

⁴ Fraser's pamphlets and articles on the Australian Aborigines include: John Fraser, "The Aborigines of New South Wales," *Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Society of New South Wales* 16: 193-233, 1882. 16 (1882): 193-233; *The Aborigines of Australia: Their Ethnic Position and Relations* (London: The Victoria (Philosophical) Institute, 1888), 1-36; "Some Remarks on the Australian Languages," *Journal and proceedings of the Royal Society of New South Wales* 24 (1890): 231-53; "On the Languages of Oceania" *Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Society of New South Wales* 26 (1892): 342-67; "The Woddowro Pronouns," *The Wombat* (1902): 1-12; "Linguistic Evidence and Archaeological and Ethnological Facts (the Sir John Rhys Memorial Lecture)," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 12 (1926): 257-72.

concluded, 'the ultimate home of origin of the negroid population of Australia is Babylonia.'⁵ It was a theory he had been promoting since at least 1882, a late flowering in the long tradition of biblically sourced narratives of the peopling of the world which is the focus of this book.

Fraser's ideas may seem strange to modern ears but they emerged naturally out of a particular, nineteenth-century worldview in which race, religion and language were inextricably bound together. Babylonian Aborigines for part of what Colin Kidd has called the 'Aryan moment' in the nineteenth century, when a mutual obsession with religion and race gave rise to numerous racist - and frequently racist - theories of the origins of the peoples of the known world.⁶ Kidd was primarily concerned in his study with the Protestant Atlantic World, but similar ideas and theories were current well beyond the northern hemisphere. Fraser's writing on the Australian Aborigines is a good example of the way Biblical theories of race, language and descent were expounded in the southern British colonies and Oceania. These lands included Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and Oceania, regions which had been mapped during James Cook's voyages of exploration in the 18th century and were swiftly infiltrated by British colonial forces including their dynamic, mostly Protestant missionary societies. This chapter will seek to place the particular views of John Fraser within this wider frame, analysing the

⁵ *Australian Language*, lviii.

⁶ Colin Kidd, *The Forging of Races: Race and Scripture in the Protestant Atlantic World, 1600-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 168.

contemporary and more recent reception of Biblical narratives of race, language and migration in the southern world.

Fraser and the missionaries

In Australia, missionaries laid the way for the Christian ethnography promoted by Fraser by preparing grammars, word lists and sample sentences and prayers of the various indigenous peoples among whom they ~~been~~were stationed. Fraser explains the trouble he took to gather these materials together and the purpose that he intended it to serve to be a record of the languages fast disappearing from eastern Australia.⁷ To identify his sources he made good use of the work of the distinguished Prussian linguist, Wilhelm Bleek (1827-1875), who had curated the philological collections of the colonial administrator, Sir George Grey (1812-1898), one-time lieutenant governor of South Australia, then governor of Cape Colony and New Zealand.⁸ Besides the various published works of the missionary linguist Lancelot Threlkeld (1788-1859), Fraser had tracked down a holograph copy of Threlkeld's Gospel of St Luke which had been deposited by Sir George Grey in the Public Library of Auckland (where it remains). Fraser transcribed this unique text into an orthography of his own devising and created a new name for the Aboriginal language in which it was written which he called 'Awabakal'. What Fraser aimed to do was to pledge these and other vestiges of the failed missionary efforts to convert and civilise

⁷ Fraser, *Australian Language*, Editor's Preface

⁸ W. H. I. Bleek and James Cameron, *The Library of His Excellency Sir George Grey*, 3 vols. (London: Trübner, 1858).

the Australian Aborigines to a new purpose - that of demonstrating the place of the Aborigines in the biblical sequence of the settlement of the Earth.

Fraser's methods were scientific by the standards of his day and his Australian study cites both Franz Bopp (1791-1867), who had demonstrated the common origin of languages of the Indo-European group, and Max Müller (1823-1900), though his reference to Bopp appears to have been acquired second hand.⁹ In his study of the 'Oceanic' languages, published in the same year as his study of Aboriginal languages, Fraser displays his learning with citations of German, French and English authorities, including Wilhelm von Humboldt, Franz Bopp, Hans Ch. von der Gabelentz, A.B. Lesson and A.B. Meyer.¹⁰ He was well aware of anthropological criticism of linguistic arguments of racial origin, noting: 'Some anthropologists, especially when they are not linguists themselves, sneer at the labours of philology as deceptive and liable to serious error.'¹¹ Yet, Fraser claimed, an understanding of the Sanskrit and 'the Hindu race' had been achieved by means of philology; he was determined to do the same for the languages of the Australian Aborigines.

Fraser's most important innovation was the claim that he had demonstrated beyond doubt the existence of linguistic and ethnic connections between the Aborigines of Australia and the Dravidians of southern India. This

⁹ Fraser, *Australian Language*, xviii.: 'Bopp says that the lowest numerals can never be introduced into any county by foreigners.' This comment was probably adopted from Robert Caldwell, *A Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian or South-Indian Family of Languages*, 2nd ed. (London: Trubner, 1875), 24-5.

¹⁰ Fraser, "Languages of Oceania," 344.

¹¹ *Australian Language*, xviii-xix. Fraser revisited this theme for his John Rhys lecture for the British Academy "Linguistic Evidence," 257-72.

was not an original idea and the substance of his argument was derived from Robert Caldwell (1814-1891), bishop of Tirunelveli (from 1877) in the southern Indian province of Tamil Nadu, specifically the second edition of Caldwell's *Comparative Dictionary of the Dravidian Languages*, which appeared in 1875.¹² Caldwell, regarded as the 'father of Dravidian linguistics' by contemporary linguists,¹³ published the first edition of his comparative grammar of the languages of southern India in 1856. While a much better linguist than Fraser, Caldwell shared a similar Biblically inspired worldview. He explained that his research on the Dravidian languages had a dual purpose, first, to be kind of a treasure house for the Dravidian peoples who wished to know more about their own culture and civilization, and secondly to provide evidence of their origins and migrations back to a putative Biblical point of origin.¹⁴ Caldwell did not see the matter as proven only suggesting, tantalizingly, that a solution to the question of Dravidian origins would one day be found: 'My own theory', he hazarded, 'is that the Dravidian languages occupy a position of their own between the languages of the Indo-European family and those of the Turanian or Scythian group - not quite a midway position, but one considerably nearer the latter than the former.'¹⁵

¹² Caldwell, *Comparative Grammar*.

¹³ For example, Guglielmo Cinque and Richard S. Kayne, *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Syntax* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 213.

¹⁴ Caldwell, *Comparative Grammar*, x.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, vii.

Caldwell aimed to distinguish the Dravidians as a group, unlike Max Müller, who had proposed that the 'Turanians' of Central Asia constituted, with the Aryans and Semites, one of only three major ethnographic and linguistic groupings of [the](#) Old World.¹⁶ Caldwell's extended his speculations further in a chapter which sought to identify which other groups of languages were related to the Dravidian group and it is here that he proposed a number of links between the languages of India and Australia. Caldwell cited Müller, along with other authorities, in order to assert that the 'Turanian' languages (a group which includes Turkish, Finnish, Hungarian and Japanese) had a common origin, which Müller linked to nomadism.¹⁷ Caldwell went on to suggest that the resemblance between the pronouns in Dravidian and those of the Australian Aborigines suggested historical links between the two races.¹⁸

For his knowledge of Australian languages, Caldwell was indebted to a paper which Wilhelm Bleek read to the Anthropological Society in London in 1871, which was also known to Fraser.¹⁹ Bleek seems to be responsible for promoting the idea that the hypothetical linguistic affinities between the Dravidian languages and the (very scanty) records of Australian Aboriginal

¹⁶ See Max Müller, *Letter to Chevalier Bunsen on the Classification of the Turanian Languages* (London: Spottiswode, 1854), 153-56. For Muller's consideration of Humboldt's and Crawford's views the languages of Polynesia, Malaya, India and New Holland (Australia), the latter, for Humboldt, having the 'lowest grade of civilization which has ever been occupied by mankind.'

¹⁷ Caldwell, *Comparative Grammar*, 67. See Müller, *Letter to Chevalier Bunsen*, 21.: 'Turanian languages may be characterised as *nomadic*, in opposition to the *Arian* languages, which.... may be called *political*...'

¹⁸ Caldwell, *Comparative Grammar*, 78.

¹⁹ W.H.I. Bleek, "On the Position of the Australian Languages," *Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 1 (1872): xi.

languages should be taken to imply direct historical and ethnic connections as well. Bleek's original research was involved with the complex clicking languages of the Khoisan peoples of southern Africa but he acquired considerable knowledge of Australian Aboriginal languages while serving as librarian to Sir George Grey, preparing a catalogue to which we have already referred.²⁰ Like Caldwell, whose work he also knew, Bleek favoured the theory of linguistic connections between Turanian, Dravidian and Australian languages, postulating that they constituted a language family which united all nomadic peoples from the steppes of Asia to those of Africa, India and, ultimately, Australia. Bleek and Caldwell supported the theory of a common 'nomadic' or 'Scythian' language.²¹ However Bleek goes much further than Caldwell in assuming that language provided direct insights into other, cultural and ethnographic features of human societies. In particular he accepted the view, also proposed by Max Müller, that nomadism was a kind of function of language and that culture and languages might degenerate from a higher order of organization. For example, the evidence of a Dravidian connection to the Australian peoples was further proof, in his view, that the Australian Aborigines had declined from a higher state of civilization (with the Dravidians higher up the scale).²² In a final flourish, Bleek concluded his paper by suggesting that the differences between prefix- and suffix- forming

²⁰ Ibid., 89-104.

²¹ Ibid., 90 citing Caldwell, pp. 51-53

²² *ibid.*, 102.

languages were also reflected in their mythology, with the prefix-forming peoples adhering to what he called 'ancestor worship', whereas the suffix-forming nomads (who included the Turanians/ Sythians such as the Dravidians and Australians) practised 'Sidereal worship'.²³ Fraser also believed that religion and language were reflections of a common racial heritage, favouring a fourfold division into Aryan, Shemitic, Turanian and Hamite each with their own religious traditions.²⁴ Suffice it to say that neither Bleek's nor Fraser's linguistic speculations nor his cultural ones have weathered the test of time. Instead, their views reflect the deeply held assumptions of the age and the drive to classify and categorise peoples, languages and religious beliefs into a single connected system.

Fraser was convinced of his own authority and made no concessions to potential critics. That his work was never cited beyond the circle of missionary admirers suggests that this confidence was misplaced, however he does make a number of distinctive, albeit unjustifiable, claims. Building on his earlier essay on the same subject,²⁵ the introduction to *An Australian language* has eleven sections, beginning with a review of grammatical principals and a biographical account of his hero, Lancelot Threlkeld. The remaining sections comprise a comprehensive, if erratic, comparative linguistics of what he assumes to be a single Australian language (there are in fact over 200 known), focusing on a

²³ Ibid., 101.

²⁴ Fraser, *The Aborigines of Australia: Their Ethnic Position and Relations*, 2.

²⁵ "The Aborigines of New South Wales," 193-233.

series of test words, especially pronouns, numerals and prepositions. Section 5 looks at the Australian numerals one, two and three, section 6 the test words for water, blind, and eye, section 7 an assortment of other test words (louse, shit, sun, bad, good, dead, the negative, to speak, to strike, woman), section 8 pronouns, section 9 word formation and section 10 grammatical form and syntax. In the latter there are over 30 examples of which the first eight are 'general' while the rest compare Australian with Dravidian. Section 11, the last, is the most speculative and concerns the origins of the Australian Race from the point of view of the Book of Genesis.

To justify his flights of logical fancy, Fraser makes the bold claim, reflecting that 'all languages have one common, although ancient, origin, and that, in the essential words of these languages, there are proofs of that common origin'.²⁶ The problem with this assumption is that it is so loosely configured that any linguistic element from any language could be cited to demonstrate a particular linguistic genealogy. In his discussion of the number one for example, Fraser had no intellectual qualms in comparing *pir* (one) in 'Australian', to terms plucked, in turn, from languages he terms 'Aryan' (including Lithuanian, Greek, Gothic and Keltic (sic), Dravidian and Sanskrit), as well as others taken from Malay, Melanesian and Polynesian languages, including Ancityum ('a Papuan island of the New Hebrides), New Britain, Samoan, the Aroma dialect of New Guinea, Motu, the Efate language of the New Hebrides, New Britain, Duke of York Island a language of 'the negroes to

²⁶ *Australian Language*, xx-xxi. Müller, *Letter to Chevalier Bunsen*, 213.

the west of Khartoum', Hebrew and 'Shemitic'.²⁷ At the end of this confection he concludes: 'I cannot see how it is possible for anyone to avoid the force of the argument from this that our Australian indigenes have a share in a common ancestry, and that, in language, their immediate ancestors are the Dravidians of India.'²⁸ In fact it was only possible to do so if you shared Fraser's underlying religious convictions.

Where Fraser differs from his more eminent philological authorities was not so much in his methods, which would have been recognizable, if open to criticism, by nineteenth century philologists, but in the final section where he extended the linguistic evidence by means of the mythic and historical narratives of the Book of Genesis. Here he asserted that the linguistic evidence demonstrated that the Australian Aborigines were descendants of the Hamites whom he calls 'progenitors of the negro races.'²⁹ To his own satisfaction, Fraser then transforms this argument, based largely on words collected in the 19th century, into claims for a geographical journey by historical peoples: first the confusion of tongues in Babylonia, then the spread of 'the black races' (ie the Hamites) from Central Asia who travelled to the mountain of Southern India, then an onward migration by sea and land until, eventually, arrival in Australia. Fraser does provide some additional layers of complexity to the narrative by suggesting that that there were two migrations to Australia, one

²⁷ Fraser, *Australian Language*, xx-xxi.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, xxii.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, lxi.

from the north and another from the south of the sub-continent, and that these migrations correspond to divisions between 'Hamites' and fairer skinned 'Kushites' in pre-Aryan India. Yet his credulity in assembling cultural assemblages to demonstrate the links he proposed knew few bounds. For example, in a list of supposed cultural affinities between Australia and India he asserts an Egyptian origin, via India, for the Australian boomerang: 'The native boomerang of Australia is used on the southeast of India, and can be traced to Egypt - both of them Hamite regions'.³⁰ Other highly malleable arguments could be made by referring to variations in physical appearance: the Aborigines look like certain Dravidian peoples in terms of their skin colour, height, gait and other physical attributes.³¹

Fraser's Biography and Reception

Far from being an isolated crank, a study of Fraser's biography reveals that he was well connected to intellectual circles in the rising colony of New South Wales as well as its missionary outposts in the Pacific and his Scottish homeland. Fraser was born in Perth in Scotland and might have been destined for a career in the Church of Scotland had he not been diverted by the lure of emigration and a career as a colonial schoolteacher. He studied Classics at the University of Edinburgh and graduated with a BA in 1852 when he was still in

³⁰ *ibid.*, lxii.

³¹ *Ibid.*

his teens.³² He emigrated to New South Wales and headed to West Maitland in the Hunter Valley where he built and founded Sauchie House, a Presbyterian secondary school which was later incorporated into Maitland High School.³³ Fraser was also an ardent amateur linguist and ethnographer, corresponding and disputing with better-connected figures such as Lorimer Fison (1832-1907), the Wesleyan missionary and pioneer anthropologist of Fiji and Tonga, and the eccentric Daisy Bates (1859-1951).³⁴ Beyond the school room, Fraser regarded himself as a serious rather than a speculative thinker: for the Polynesian Society, he published articles on the Malay and Polynesian languages³⁵; his essay on the Australian Aborigines was awarded the 1882 Prize of the Royal Society of New South Wales, the oldest learned society in any of the southern colonies.³⁶ This essay, entitled 'The Aborigines of New South Wales', provides the first version of his biblical ethnography of the Aborigines from a displacement of the Kushite tribes from old Babylonia into the remote parts of

³² Graduates for 23 April 1852, *A Catalogue of the Graduates in the Faculties of Arts, Divinity and Law of the University of Edinburgh* (Edinburgh: Neill, 1858), p. 234

³³ David Roberts, 'John Fraser'. 'Awaba,
<http://www.newcastle.edu.au/school/hss/research/publications/awaba/people/everend-john-fraser.html> (Accessed 19 December 2016).

³⁴ For Lorimer Fison's connections, see for example his correspondence with Walter Baldwin Spencer.

<http://web.prm.ox.ac.uk/sma/index.php/primary-documents/primary-documents-index/489-spencer-box-1-fison-letter-1-on.html>.

³⁵ John Fraser, "The Malayo-Polynesian Theory," *Journal of the Polynesian Society* 4, 5 (1895-1896): 241-55, 92-107.

³⁶ "The Aborigines of New South Wales," 193-233.

the world and it is worth summarising.³⁷ Fraser provided eleven points which, he states, supported his theory of the global movement of the Hamitic tribes from Babylon via India and Melanesia and Polynesia to Australia:

1. Ethnologies recognise two pre-Aryan races in India, of which the 'noseless' people of the Vedas are 'our aboriginals'.

2. The Kolarian and Dravidian languages have inclusive and exclusive forms for the plural of the first person - as do 'many of the languages of Melanesia and Polynesia' and 'probably' the dialects of the north-west of Australia, though Fraser admits he does not have any evidence of this.

3. The aborigines of the south and west of Australia use the same words for I, thou, he, we, you as the natives of the Madras coasts of India

4. The native boomerang of Australia is used on the south-east of India, and can be traced to Egypt - both Hamite regions

5. Among the red races of America 'who are Turanian' four is a sacred number. In Egypt the pyramids have square bases; the castes of India are four, and the 'universal' division of the native tribes in Australia is also four

6. The class names form their feminines in that, a 'peculiarly Shemitic inflexion'

7. Several tribes practice circumcision - another Shemitic feature. The Aborigines also look like Hamites (Africans); others look like Kushites.

³⁷ Ibid.

8. In some parts of Australia, the Aborigines erect stages to expose the dead just like the Parsees. In other places they place them in a hollow tree, just like the Persians.

9. 'There is nothing improbable in the supposition that the first inhabitants of Australia came from the north-west, that is from Hindustan or Further India' because native Polynesians all point to the west as the source for their ancestors.

10. The kinship system among the Tamil and Telugu is 'the same essentially' as that of the Australian Aborigines.

11. Identity of language is strong evidence of identity of origin and therefore all the Australian tribes speak the same languages, with phonetic variations.³⁸

Hence, he concludes, These eleven points are the main points of an argument by which I would maintain that our black people came originally from the shores of the Persian Gulf, and that they came to us through India.³⁹ None of these points was provable or scientific and several, such as the link between the four sides of an Egyptian pyramid and the number of division in Aboriginal tribes is decidedly flaky, but Fraser was undeterred by logic or criticism. He continued to repeat the same basic thesis in all his subsequent studies of Aboriginal linguistics culminating in *An Australian Language*.

³⁸ Fraser, 'Aborigines' pp. 196-99.

³⁹ Fraser, 'Aborigines', p. 199.

Despite his intellectual limitations, Fraser shared his intellectual and religious passions with a close circle of like-minded religious friends. Niel Gunson sees him as the prime mover in a circle of missionary ethnographers active in the Pacific region corresponding with agents in the field as well as those who had retired to Sydney.⁴⁰ Besides his work for the Royal Society of New South Wales, Fraser was a founder of the Australasian Society for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) and the Polynesian Society. With other missionaries he presented papers to the early meetings of the AAAS, which D.J. Mulvaney has suggested 'skirted the lunatic fringe' and were little more than religious propaganda.⁴¹ His most ardent scholarly research was in the field of comparative linguistics, using the erratic methods we have already observed for other creative exercises in historical ethnography.⁴² In 1879 he published his first book-length work of linguistic archaeology entitled: *The Etruscans: were they Celts?* which attempted to demonstrate, from an analysis of forty Etruscan 'fossil words' that the Etruscans were not only Celts but the first of the 'Japhetic' tribes to populate Europe.⁴³ His curious Etruscan study, referred to as 'a monument to his linguistic attainments and intellectual power', was the foundation for the award of the degree of Doctor of Laws from the Queen's

⁴⁰ Niel Gunson, "British Missionaries and Their Contribution to Science in the Pacific Islands," in *Darwin's Laboratory: Evolutionary Theory and Natural History in the Pacific*, ed. Roy MacLeod and Philip F. Rehbock (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1994), 303.

⁴¹ Ibid., 316. citing D.J. Mulvaney, 'Australian Anthropology and ANZAAS', in *The Commonwealth of Science: ANZAAS and the Scientific Enterprise in Australasia, 1888-1988*, ed. Roy MacLeod (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1988), 199-200.

⁴² See *ibid.*, 304.

⁴³ John Fraser, *The Etruscans: Were They Celts?* (Edinburgh, 1879), 3.

University of Kingston, Canada, in 1887 at which stage he was still living in Maitland, NSW.⁴⁴ The citation also refers to his work on the ethnology of the Australian aborigines and 'his character of singular modesty and worth.'⁴⁵ The modesty seems to have been genuine; after his retirement as Principal in 1884, he refused any ceremony but accepted a testimonial of appreciation put together by his former pupils.⁴⁶ He then devoted the years of his retirement to the huge project of editing the works of Lancelot Threlkeld, which finally appeared in 1892, as well as publishing the works of Presbyterian missionary comrades in the New Hebrides.⁴⁷ His linguistic studies of the languages of the Pacific were, like his work on the Australian languages, spiced with speculative genealogies of origin; a good example of this is his study of the links between Malay and Polynesian languages.⁴⁸

Unfortunately, Fraser's philological and historical theories were not welcomed either by contemporary or modern scholars. According to his most sympathetic modern critic, Neil Gunson, Fraser's edition of the work of Lancelot Threlkeld was significantly damaged by the racial and linguistic ideas of the Introduction, which severely limited the quality of his analysis.⁴⁹ With a

⁴⁴ Calendar of Queen's University at Kingston, Canada. p. 213.

⁴⁵ Citation from the *Toronto Daily Mail* quoted in the *Maitland Mercury and Hunter River General Advertiser*, Thursday 30 June 1887, p. 5.

⁴⁶ 'Testimonial to Mr John Fraser,' *Maitland Mercury and Hunter River General Advertiser*, Tuesday 29 January 1884, p. 5.

⁴⁷ Sydney H. Ray, "The Languages of the New Hebrides, Ed. By John Fraser," *Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Society of New South Wales* 22 (1893): 101-67, 469-70.

⁴⁸ Fraser, "The Malayo-Polynesian Theory."

⁴⁹ Gunson, *Australian Reminiscences and Papers of L.E. Threlkeld*, 1:1.

number of other missionary ethnographers, including Daniel MacDonald (1846-1927) of the New Hebrides, Gunson sees Fraser as regrettably attached to what he calls 'exotic and bizarre theories'.⁵⁰ In his own day Fraser was enmeshed in trench warfare which pitted Darwinian evolutionists of human society, such as the Wesleyan missionary ethnographer Lorimor Fison (1832-1907) and Sir Walter Baldwin Spencer (1860-1929), whose photographs and field work in Central Australia make him the founding father of Australian anthropology, against Christian evolutionists who continued to use scriptural narratives to support racial and social speculation about indigenous societies. Fison referred to him in a letter to Spencer as 'that ass Fraser' decrying both his academic credentials and those of fellow Scottish Presbyterian, the Rev. John Mathew (1849-1929)⁵¹: 'it will be a be a lasting disgrace to our University [ie the University of Sydney] if the authorities give him a degree for that rubbish.'⁵² The 'rubbish' for which Mathew completed his prize-giving work had similar underlying assumptions to Fraser. Mathew thought that the Aboriginal people were formed as a result of three successive invasions, by Papuans, Dravidians and Malays, and that each wave was culturally superior to the one which preceded it. He likened the process to the formation of the United Kingdom of

⁵⁰ "British Missionaries," 304.

⁵¹ For John Mathew and his major work, *Eaglehawk and Crow* (1899), see Malcolm Prentis, *Science, Race and Faith: A Life of John Mathew, 1849-1929* (Sydney: Centre for the Study of Australian Christianity, 1998).

⁵² Fison to Spencer, letter 2, 1899 or 1900. Spencer papers, Pitt Rivers Museum (Oxford). Transcribed for Pitt Rivers Virtual Collections, <http://web.prm.ox.ac.uk/sma/index.php/primary-documents/primary-documents-index/489-spencer-box-1-fison-letter-1-on.html> (accessed 8 Nov. 2014).

Great Britain and Ireland with the British Celts likened to the Papuans in Australia, the Saxons to the Dravidians, and the Normans to the Malays: 'In each case', he explained, 'from the first two races the bulk of the people is sprung and the vocabulary and grammar are inherited, while the third race sprinkled here and there over the land has left the slightest lingual traces of its presence.'⁵³

In the wake of the popularisation of the work of Charles Darwin after the publication of *The Origin of Species* (1859), it is sometimes suggested that secular evolutionists and Christians divided into mutually warring camps. The Darwinians might be presented as the successors and rivals to the missionary linguists who preceded them and for whom language was a tool for Christianisation of the heathen, a means to mediate from a lower to a higher spiritual condition.⁵⁴ Modern post-colonial critics have continued to reach harsh conclusions about scripturally-driven narratives of missionary linguists and anthropologists, such as those of the Scottish Presbyterians, Fraser MacDonald and Mathew.⁵⁵ Such views, they argue, reflect racial anxieties

⁵³ Mathew 1889, 383. Cited by Ian J. McNiven and Lynette Russell, *Appropriated Pasts : Indigenous Peoples and the Colonial Culture of Archaeology*, Archaeology in Society Series (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2005), 127.

⁵⁴ For example Rachael Gilmour, "Missionaries, Colonialism and Language in Nineteenth-Century South Africa," *History Compass* 5 (2007): 1761-77; *Grammars of Colonialism: Representing Languages in Colonial South Africa* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2006); Johannes Fabian, *Language and Colonial Power: The Appropriation of Swahili in the Former Belgian Congo, 1880-1938* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); "Missions and the Colonization of African Languages: Developments in the Former Belgian Congo," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 17, no. 2 (1983): 165-87.

⁵⁵ McNiven and Russell, *Appropriated Pasts : Indigenous Peoples and the Colonial Culture of Archaeology*; Lynda Newland, "The Lost Tribes of Israel – and the Genesis of Christianity in Fiji: Missionary Notions of Fijian Origin from 1835 to Cession and

about the legitimacy of the ongoing conquests of subject peoples (including the Australian Aborigines), and settler colonial fears of racial mixing leading to degeneration and national decline. Yet there is another view, which sees Biblical theories of race as an integral part of the colonising world view of Victorian Christians, one which allowed adjustment to be made of the shock of new discoveries and the expansion of the human family. Christian evolutionists also acted as a bulwark against harsher, hierarchical forms of racism that suggested that the races and languages of the world were evidence of separate species. It is also important to recognise that native peoples themselves frequently embraced scriptural interpretations of their origins, reclaiming Christian myths of origin as part of post-colonial self-fashioning. This was particularly the case for theories which linked the various peoples of the Pacific with remnants of the lost tribes of Israel as we will see in the final section of this paper.

The Lost Tribes in the Pacific

As part of the discourse of the lost tribes, claims have been made for the Semitic origins of Pacific peoples since at least the 17th century when the author of a map of the journeys of English adventurer, William Dampier, claimed he had detected members of the lost tribes in Papua New Guinea.⁵⁶

Beyond," *Oceania* 85, no. 3 (2015): 256-70; Matt Tomlinson, "Efficacy, Truth, and Silence: Language Ideologies in Fijian Christian Conversions," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 51, no. 1 (2009): 64-90.

⁵⁶ See 'Map of the Discoveries made by Captain William Dampier in the Roebuck in 1699', John Harris, *Complete Collection of Voyages and Travels* (London, 1744), n.p. For discussion, see Ivan Davidson Kalmar and Derek Jonathan Penslar, eds., *Orientalism and the Jews*, 1st ed., (Waltham, Mass.: Brandeis University Press, 2005), 61.

They continued unabated in missionary writing such as that of the founder of the Baptist Missionary Society, William Carey (1761-1834). As part of the Enlightenment project of naming and describing the world's peoples, missionaries and government agencies collaborated in describing new territories for European exploitation while seeking to generate explanation which could explain and integrate the extraordinary people, languages and cultures they encountered in the Pacific.⁵⁷ While missionaries led the way, they were not isolated in their support of the literal truth of the Bible as a source for historical and linguistic truths about the world. Timothy Larsen has argued that the Bible retained its primacy for people across the reading classes throughout the Victorian age and that its imprint is as clear on those who decried its truths as for its more overt adherents.⁵⁸ This meant that for both Christian and secular Victorians, it was not ridiculous to suppose that Aborigines were, ultimately, migrants from Babylon or that Pacific Islanders were Jews.

To briefly recap the main outline of the lost tribes as recounted in the Book of Genesis, Noah had three sons, Shem ('dark'), Ham ('black') and Japeth ('wide' / fair), who were traditionally seen as progenitors of the peoples of Asia, Africa and Europe, although earlier people had given birth to other children and giants.⁵⁹ Fifteen generations later, Shem's descendants, the

⁵⁷ Newland, "Lost Tribes," 251-55.

⁵⁸ Timothy Larsen, *A People of One Book: The Bible and the Victorians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 1-7.

⁵⁹ Genesis 6:4

twelve sons of Jacob (Israel), Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph and Benjamin, were said to have taken possession of the Promised Land of Canaan.⁶⁰ However, the tribes did not enjoy their possession of the Promised Land for long. In 722 BC, the northern Kingdom of Israel - made up of ten tribes, with the exception of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, were conquered by the Assyrians after which the ten tribes fall from knowledge.⁶¹ The legend of what eventually became of the ten tribes constitutes one of the most fascinating elements in the diasporic history of the Jewish people.⁶² As the *Encyclopedia Judaica* puts it, there is hardly a place or a people from across the globe, from the Japanese to the Red Indians, who have not been claimed to be one of the lost tribes.⁶³ According to the British Israelites, a religious movement at its heyday in the 1840s, the British themselves could be traced to the lost tribes.⁶⁴ What is significant, therefore, is not so much the claim that the Maori, or the Aborigines, or the British, were members of the lost tribes, but the particular shape this origin narrative takes in different colonial contexts. It is also critical to recognise that the Semitic lost tribes were peoples of Asia; the Hamites were peoples of Africa, and in the

⁶⁰ Genesis 29:5-33.

⁶¹ Though see also Isaiah 11.11, Jeremiah 31:8 and Ezekiel 37:19-24 for prophecies that they would return.

⁶² Louis Isaac Rabinowitz. "Ten Lost Tribes." In *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, 2nd ed. Vol. 19 (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), pp. 639-640.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Kidd, *Forging*, 210.

race-obsessed context of the later nineteenth century this implied different orders of civilisation.

Along with Cook's voyages, the potential existence of lost Judaic peoples in the Pacific acted as a spur to those ardent Christians who preached in favour of missionary societies in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.⁶⁵ William Carey's widely read tract, *An Enquiry into the Obligation of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens* (1792) makes a particular point of referring to the South Seas.⁶⁶ Carey used tables to lay out the world like a scene for Christian battle with Pagans, Muslims, Jews and various kinds of Christians (Papists, Protestants, Lutherans, Calvinists, and Greek Christians are the terms he uses) waiting in their millions for the arrival of suitable missionaries. Carey felt a particular urgency for the 'new' lands of New Holland, New Guinea and New Zealand, inhabited as they were by savages and cannibals: 'They are in general poor, barbarous, naked pagans', Carey wrote, 'as destitute of civilization, as they are of true religion'.⁶⁷ It was therefore essential that Christian missionaries be sent to enlighten, educate and Christianize these new regions.

⁶⁵ For the impact of Cook's voyages on missionary advocates, see Elizabeth Elbourne, *Blood Ground* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queens' University Press, 2002), 51.

⁶⁶ William Carey, *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians, to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens* (Leicester: Ann Ireland, 1792), 67.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

Missionary rhetoric was soon followed by the arrival of missionary agents. The missionary voyages of the Duff in 1796, 1797 and 1798 were the immediate response of the London Missionary Society (LMS, founded 1795) to Cook's discoveries in the South Seas.⁶⁸ The official account of these voyages, including the published journals of the missionaries, are full of Enlightenment enthusiasm for the promotion of knowledge. This encompassed both the advance of scientific information about the geography, languages, physical composition, politics and cultural habits of the natives, and the nobler objects as the Society put it in their dedication to the King, of communicating the message of Christianity to these unenlightened regions.⁶⁹ When Fraser proposed a biblical narrative for the peopling of the Pacific, he was the heir to two centuries of Christian speculation, Enlightenment enthusiasm and missionary endeavour.

While many peoples claimed to be descendants of the lost tribes, in the Pacific the most highly developed version of this mythic history focused on the Maori of New Zealand⁷⁰ Steeped in biblical history, the first missionaries to New Zealand had speculated on different explanations for the racial origins of the Maori. It was natural for them to attempt to connect the peoples

⁶⁸ London Missionary Society, *A Missionary Voyage to the Southern Pacific Ocean... in the Ship Duff* (London: T. Chapman, 1799).

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, a2.

⁷⁰ Tudor Parfit and Emanuela Trevisan Semi, *Judaising Movements: Studies in the Margins of Judaism in Modern Times* (London: Routledge, 2002), 9-10. For an introduction to debates about the semitic Maori, see M. P. K. Sorrenson, *Maori Origins and Migrations: The Genesis of Some Pakeha Myths and Legends* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1979).

they observed with descendants of one or other of the three sons of Noah, usually the Hamites, or, more prestigiously, with the wanderings of the Semitic lost tribes. The theory was elaborated by the missionary Richard Taylor (1805-73) in his history of New Zealand which came complete with explanations for the Semitic features of the Maori language, customs and physical appearance.⁷¹ But the Maori were not alone and other missionaries speculated on the Semitic origins of peoples scattered throughout Polynesia and Melanesia and the route of their journeys from bible lands to the South Seas.⁷² According to the academic anthropologist Edward Taylor, the Aryan progenitors of the Sanskrit language were also the ancestors of the peoples and languages of the Malayan and Polynesian islands which included, at the far west of the migration, the New Zealand Maori.⁷³ Daniel MacDonald (1846-1927), the first Presbyterian missionary to the New Hebrides, argued that all the Oceanic languages were Semitic in origin, a theory he promoted in a series of books.⁷⁴ In *The Asiatic Origin of the Oceanic Languages*, McDonald prepared a lengthy etymological dictionary of Efate, a language of the New Hebrides, in

⁷¹ Richard Taylor, *Te Ika a Maui, or, New Zealand and Its Inhabitants*. 2nd ed. (London: William Macintosh, 1870).

⁷² K. R. Howe. 'Ideas of Maori origins - 1770s-1840s: early ideas', Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, updated 22-Sep-12
URL: <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/ideas-of-maori-origins/page-1>

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ J. Graham Miller, 'Daniel MacDonald (1846-1927)', *Australian Dictionary of Evangelical Biography*, Southern Cross College, 2004.
<http://webjournals.ac.edu.au/ojs/index.php/ADEB/article/view/958/955>
(Accessed 11 January 2017).

which he proposed parallels between words in Efate with Hebrew.⁷⁵ It was therefore inevitable that the Australian Aborigines would be given a scriptural makeover of the kind provided by Fraser which would unite them to tribal remnants dotted throughout the Christian world.

Despite their relative ubiquity, speculative scriptural theories of racial origin were not acceptable to all Christian scholars many of whom were convinced by more rigorous critical standards in the rising sciences of philology, history and ethnography. Critics included the Cornish missionary to New Zealand, William Colenso (1811-1899), who noted that in the rush to establish European and/or Indian roots for the native people of New Zealand many neglected to understand the Maori language: 'some Europeans have ventured to write 'learnedly' upon it! using (without acknowledgement) the material obtained by others and racking and distorting by turns Hebrew, Sanscrit, Arabic, Greek, Coptic, Spanish, and many others; never once suspecting their ignorance of that of New Zealand'.⁷⁶ There was also controversy over particular versions of the theory, whether, for example the Maori were properly numbered among the Hamitic descendants of Noah in Africa, or were one of the later, Semitic, lost tribes.

Importantly, many Pacific people continue to accept the legitimacy of the theory of the lost tribes right up to recent times. For example, the notion of

⁷⁵ D. McDonald, *The Asiatic Origin of the Oceanic Languages* (London: Melville, 1894).

⁷⁶ Quoted by Sorrenson, *Maori Origins and Migrations: The Genesis of Some Pakeha Myths and Legends*.

the Aryan Maori was an attractive one to Maori who favoured the Aryans as a warrior people like themselves with a capacity for sea-faring and dominance over other races.⁷⁷ Lynda Newland has argued that the notion that they were descendants of the lost tribes was a routine assumption by Fijians and were deeply felt in the late nineteenth century.⁷⁸ These scriptural notions resurfaced as recently as the 1987 coup when claims for biblical ancestry were used to support arguments for political and racial ascendancy by Fijian leaders over Indian and other ethnic emigrants.⁷⁹ In these and other ways, it is evident that Christian narratives of origin were not displaced by secular anthropology, philology and history in the late nineteenth century, but were adapted to new visions of the past.

Conclusion

Finally, we need to return to John Fraser and the Babylonian Aborigines. Fraser's ethno-linguistics of the Australian Aborigines reveals the persistence of scriptural and racial ideas, which continued to flower in the wake of Darwinian evolution, driven as they were by missionary ideals. These include the need to justify scriptural narratives about the source and origin of human races ('one blood'), historical patterns of global emigration ('inheriting the earth'), and millennial excitement about the coming end. These notions were

⁷⁷ For Maori adaption of Christian origin theories, see Tony Ballantyne, *Webs of Empire: Locating New Zealand's Colonial Past* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2012), 139-60.

⁷⁸ Newland, "Lost Tribes," 256-70.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

important for missionaries and their supporters in the Pacific, Australia and New Zealand, agents for whom John Fraser was a central and significant intellectual advocate. Despite what might appear to be derogatory comments about the place of the Aborigines in the hierarchy of the races, Fraser was a consistent and humane advocate for the Aboriginal people of Australia, opposed to any suggestion that they were not human or had evolved separately to other peoples of the world: they was no separate creation and the Aborigines were, 'an integral portion of the human race.'⁸⁰ Fraser's Babylonian Aborigines ultimately demonstrated the spiritual as well as the linguistic and racial identity of the people of the world, that God, as the author of the of Book of Acts made plain: 'hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on al the face of the earth' (Acts 17:26 KJV).

It is clear that these ideas were not particularly new or original and that Fraser was simply following the model of other respectable writers who used linguistic and other comparative evidence to create a racial history which would connect known to unknown peoples. In able hands the science of linguistics had yielded up what appeared to be extraordinary evidence of hitherto unknown relationships between languages. While this in fact said very little about the physical migration history of the contemporary people who spoke those languages, there were few who resisted the temptation to extend the linguistic evidence well beyond what it revealed. Scientific linguists were attempting to move the study of ancient people beyond the mythical domain

⁸⁰ Fraser, *Australian Language*, lix.

of scripture which postulated that all peoples were descended from the three sons of Noah or, as we have seen, might be related to one or other of the lost tribes of Israel.

In suggesting that the languages of the Australian Aborigines, which he edited with such care, could be linked first to southern India and then to Babylon, Fraser was following the precedent of some of the most distinguished linguists of his own day, including Max Müller who dreamed of demonstrating, through grammar 'that men are brethren ... - the children of the same father - whatever their country, their colour, their language, and their faith.'⁸¹ While always presented as scientific and detached, all theories which attempted to link the races of mankind to some putative ancestral home in and around Mesopotamia were following a much older narrative of origins. These theories carried with them the assumption of a single creation myth, a homeland and a proto-language out of which all the peoples of the world had subsequently dispersed. It implied a lost Garden of Eden, an ar~~ke~~ and a flood, a Tower of Babel and a multiplication of languages from a pre-lapsarian universal tongue. In such a world, the lost tribes of Israel continued to wander, the Dravidian people of India travelled across seas and islands to colonise Australia - or, in an alternative scenario, they were defeated by the triumphant Aryans who eventually travelled as far as New Zealand. These were all assumptions made by people with an intimate knowledge of the Bible. John

⁸¹ Müller, *Letter to Chevalier Bunsen*, 226.

Fraser was part of this speculative bubble and the Babylonian Aborigines are only understandable within this context.

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